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ABSTRACT

This publication attempts to summarize and paraphrase the views expressed by participants in a conference on organizational processes in education. Purpose of the conference was to recommend areas of basic field research in education that emphasize both traditional ethnographic procedures and the use and development of more controlled methods for the analysis of social interaction in educational settings. The author stresses the value of field methods for pinpointing organizational processes and personal interactions that cannot be effectively analyzed through large-scale statistical studies. (Author/JG)

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# Organizational Processes in Education:

# Field Research on Interactions within Educational Organizations

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A report submitted to the National Institute of Education. The views expressed are those of the author. I have tried to summarize a broad range of views expressed at the conference held in La Jolla from January 31 to February 2, 1975. I have not always followed the sequence of the conference nor have I always documented everyone's remarks. The remarks herein reflect my biases and my attempt to organize a sometimes far-ranging discussion. I am grateful to Robbins Burling and Hugh Mehan for their helpful criticisms and suggestions.

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Conference on
Organizational Processes in Education:
Field Research on Interactions within Educational Organizations
La Jolla, Calif
January 31 - February 2, 1975


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## I. Introduction

This conference on organizational processes in education was organized to recommend areas of basic field research in education that emphasized both traditional ethnographic procedures and the use and development of more controlled methods for the analysis of the everyday social interaction that is observed and recorded in educational settings.

Field studies permit an examination of daily social processes that are not evident in studies using survey techniques or data sources produced by the organizations studied. These daily processes can be inferred only indirectly by survey techniques or techniques that rely on aggregate data and correlational methods of analysis. Statistical distributions that reveal a correlation between class size and student achievement do not permit us to assess day-to-day performance and the evaluation techniques used by teachers and administrators. A similar problem exists with attempts to show that desegregation enhances school achievement as measured by test scores. Even when we find consistently high correlations in such macro studies we cannot determine the dynamics of day-to-day activities and how such correlations are produced. We cannot assess the significance of the correlations for individuals in some cohort of students. The correlational studies do not enable us to evaluate qualitative differences in teaching and administrative programs. Even when we find that cohorts of students achieve well or poorly with respect to other cohorts of previous years on similar tests, we cannot assess later success or failure in occupational pursuits or in college

courses except by reference to abstract measures that do not index the day-to-day social processes of the classroom, teacher-teacher conferences, teacher-administrator conferences and the contextual conditions of success or failure. Macro studies do not provide adequate information on the day-to-day activities of a particular program that has been called a success or a failure. Different methodological strategies are needed to find ways of linking day-to-day activities in the classroom to implicit or explicit decisions about the placement of students in educational categories that imply different levels of educational achievement.

## II. Needed Basic Field Research on Educational Processes

A number of suggestions were made during the conference on the gaps in our knowledge about educational processes that require basic research. The following list summarizes the areas mentioned.

1. A concern expressed throughout the conference was the fact that we have little basic knowledge about how cultural processes are transmitted to the child and how cultural ideas or practices are interpreted for the child in the classroom. The different cultural backgrounds that children bring to the classroom need to be documented along with differences in the cultural background of teachers. The relationship between classroom lessons, testing procedures, and cultural background remains unclear. The translation of cultural ideas by the teacher and the child's reception of these ideas remains a problematic issue at different stages in a student's school career.

2. The curricula designed by different school districts and states are standardized for presentation to class sizes that can range from about twenty to perhaps forty students. If important cultural differences exist among children then it is unlikely that standardized curricula can be viewed as passive aspects of the student's classroom and testing performances. The kinds of social skills that can be learned in the classroom are as significant as the cognitive skills that tend to be emphasized on evaluative occasions. We need research on the social knowledge that the child must learn, including the ability to understand and learn instructions and rules.

3. A related aspect of the study of cultural processes includes the types of deference and demeanor exhibited and expected in the class-

room by teachers and in testing situations outside of class. A similar problem exists for children. We know very little about the cultural conceptions of deference and demeanor that children bring from home.

4. Another problem that will require careful field work asks how it is that we have developed cultural traditions that stress particular types of evaluative procedures. Many evaluative procedures can be used for political purposes and for social change. We seldom examine the cultural basis for what we take for granted in education. Instead we assume that clear educational objectives exist and that the measures of success and failure should not be called into question. Educational institutions use ambiguous methods and practices whose foundations are difficult to assess because the methods and practices enable educational bureaucracies to evaluate large numbers of students economically. We need studies of evaluation techniques that call into question their use for the sake of bureaucratic expediency. Qualitative methods of evaluation are seldom a match for evaluation techniques that are economical and simultaneously capable of processing large batches of students quickly, even if there are serious negative consequences.

5. What are the variety of ways in which students are evaluated and placed into different achievement groups on the basis of some kind of screening? The placement practices begin when children are sorted into different kindergarten classrooms. We know nothing about the criteria used by different school districts and schools for screening and placement. We do not know how these practices in the U.S. compare with other western countries. For example in the U.S. it is widely

accepted that parents put pressure on teachers and administrators to have their children placed in particular classes and that teachers and administrators may anticipate such pressures in advance by using available information to decide against placements to which they think the parents will object. The different stages of a child's school career involve similar evaluative practices that have a serious impact on future opportunities at higher levels of the educational system. A related issue is how administrators seek information on children who are termed to be "problems" for a variety of reasons.

6. The evaluation of students can vary by class and school size. The relationship between class and school size and the knowledge a teacher or administrator can have about students without consulting official records is unclear. Our educational philosophy pays considerable lip service to the idea that individualized attention to students should occur despite a clear recognition that instruction will always take place in fairly large group settings. We do not know how class size affects the way the teacher can learn about different students, give more attention to those students who are easiest to work with and less to those who create problems, or vice versa. Nor do we know how class size and differences in the types of students labeled as "problems" affect the evaluation of students on a day-to-day basis and in monthly, biannual or yearly reports. How daily evaluations based on short periods of time affect the summaries that occur at regular intervals remain unclear. Thus how does class and school size affect the quality and amount of information that teachers and administrators can obtain on students?

A related problem is whether the evaluations that occur at different schools in different parts of the country refer to similar kinds of behavior and if the materials used for documentation can be related to standardized test norms on a national level?

III. Needed Field Research as Defined by Practitioners

A general theme addressed by conference participants was the need for research on the characteristics of school districts, their personnnel, and their students. Don Morrison and Blas Garza suggested issues whose study would provide teachers and administrators with basic information on school processes and student adaptation problems stemming from differences in cultural backgound. Brief summaries of the issues raised are now presented.

1. The elementary school-junior high school transition often requires students to change from a self-contained sixth grade where they interact with the same teacher for most of the day, to a junior high setting where the student may have six different classes and see different teachers for a short period of time each day. The practitioner desires information on how we can make a difficult transition easier for students when there are changes in physical plant size, new rules, and a more complex bureaucratic organization.

2. The "open" and "self-contained" classrooms pose different educational problems for students, teachers, and administrators. Learning by students and the achievement of teaching goals can be defined differently in each setting. Research is needed which compares the educational benefits students derive from different types of classroom organization, and the behavioral problems that can emerge for the teacher.

3. Teachers are required to identify objectives and skills that students will learn and that teachers will attempt to achieve in the classroom at different stages of education. Could skill centers

be established where different experts would be assembled? Research would be needed to evaluate the organizational and instructional consequences of establishing skill centers and how they would influence classroom organization and implementation.

4. Educational systems are very sensitive to issues stemming from differences in cultural background and the evaluation of students who are judged to need a bilingual program. Research is needed to decide which children should be involved in various forms of bilingual curricula. Many children seem to have a surface ability to use English that does not prove to be adequate in actual classroom settings. Research is needed to assess how different students with complex language socialization experiences can handle particular classes where the instructional material presumes some unspecified level of skill in English or say Spanish.

5. Could we develop a more flexible method for deciding when children would enter school and when they would begin to be exposed to certain basic skills like reading and writing? School entrance could begin at say age six regardless of the time of the year that this occurs. Children could be evaluated regularly to see when reading might be started instead doing this on a group basis at a specific grade level.

6. A sixth issue focused on how we are to describe the notion of multiculturalism and its significance for educational programs. The question was whether specifiable types of norms can be identified that schools regard as acceptable for orienting classroom behavior

and instructional programs? How might different cultural values that are associated with particular ethnic groups be incorporated into the school setting, instead of thinking that individual children have to change so that they conform to something called the mainstream or dominant cultural norms? The general idea would be to expand the range of acceptable behavior as well as expand the scope of topics that deal with minority groups.

The number of research issues of interest to practitioners was quite extensive. Instead of continuing to describe each one separately I shall summarize the remaining topics mentioned. One general issue raised was the relationship between administrative organization and the quality of the learning experience in the classroom. Do specialists have a greater impact on classroom learning by being attached to the central administration or by being assigned to schools? A related issue is how can we evaluate the size and cost of administration vis-a-vis the resources that are put into classroom support? Can teachers and counselors be more effective if some of their duties that have involved routine clerical work could be assumed by others in a non-professional category? Considerable money is being devoted to special programs such as English as a second language, but it is not clear if the schools are capable of evaluating the child's problems and if the programs are adequate. Additional questions were raised about research on school size, school drop-outs, alternative grading systems, the value of planned extra-school experiences between students and teachers, the significance of special school

programs and tutorials that are organized by minority groups outside of the school's jurisdiction, better use of teachers who wish to spend part of the day in the classroom and also be active in a community job or activity as well, and a variety of suggestions on different teaching styles and the assignment of students to classrooms.

In the discussion that followed the description of practitioner definitions of educational research problems a number of remarks by Roy D'Andrade seemed to summarize the contrast between a basic research perspective and the issues outline above. Issues such as changing the size of the classroom, the number of classrooms, the teacher's specialization, the reorganization of the ecology of classrooms, moving specialists out of the central office, notes D'Andrade, can be accomplished by the top echelons of the administration. But we must distinguish between instituting a program by administrative fiat and the realistic implementation of that program at all levels of a school district. Even if teachers and administrators could agree to such changes the student's perspective is not included. Asking students about the issues noted above would probably give us a different orientation to these issues and also mean the introduction of many new issues. The students' list would probably be different and include many personal elements as well. The specific issue of bilingual education was cited to illustrate how an important problem can be started in a district to reflect practitioner and family concerns with this problem and yet the net results will probably not

be very different from the conditions that existed when the program was started. Unless there is a way of specifying the elements of a top level program by independent criteria that are not particular to a given district, specific districts will utilize their limited resources to develop a program that could easily have poorly trained teachers, poor facilities, and in general, a poor program that is lower than existing activities in the district. And while this poor program may not be inevitable, its failure is likely to be part of the district's expectations. Asking researchers to come in and tell district officials what is likely to be the effect of the program poses a difficult problem for the researcher. It is difficult for researchers to evaluate programs that are designed and implemented according to local definitions and local political and economic issues which generate many constraints on a new and often unpopular program. Local conditions create forces that are likely to guarantee that existing power arrangments and routines will not be disturbed. Thus a bilingual program is likely to end up as a "trash out" program and provide some members of the school district with the argument that such programs are worthless. This is not to deny that such programs can be quite valuable but that local programs started on a crash basis will not benefit from an after the fact evaluation by researchers. The possible failure of such programs would say nothing about the possibility of developing bilingual programs based on prior research conditions that could contribute to subsequent planning and implementation. The possibility of evaluating such programs as bilingual education

means operating under difficult internal political contexts or administrative decisions or actions that have built into them local conditions that will push the programs in particular ways. The researchers' activities could be compromised and have little or no impact.

We know little about innovations that are deemed successful in school districts. Do successful programs occur in settings where there is considerable power behind the activity, in newer schools with enthusiastic teachers and administrators? But even when reports suggest that a program has been successful, it is not clear how long such programs last and what conditions are necessary to keep the school from returning to a situation that existed previously. Thus a local decision to create a new program and the processes necessary to carry out the objectives can result in consequences that are unpredictable, consequences that can move in a variety of unanticipated directions. It is difficult for researchers to observe local conditions from the start to insure an adequate monitoring system, when local conditions impose political, economic and social assumptions and constraints that are often defined as outside a researcher's domain of inquiry. The desire to make big "moves" within a school district requires monitoring the many "little things" that will also have to be implemented but which are seldom specified as part of the original plans. The "little things" will undergo changes and create problems that are unanticipated. The process of implementation is crucial

because responsibility shifts to local decisions and generates problems that are not monitored by those at the top of the district. Researchers can only enter such a complex picture with considerable handicaps. It is difficult to carry out careful research when the context itself generates conflicts that are triggered by a variety of local interests at different levels of the district.

Research on why large, legislated programs fail would be an important contribution to policy makers and also clarify what is characteristic about the people in a district that leads to inadequate implementation of programs and the same old ways of doing things. This means doing careful field research on basic social processes to learn why it is difficult to make changes in school districts despite the allocation of huge sums of money.

Everyone agreed that it would be important to watch different programs like bilingual education to see how they operate, where they go, and if they fail or succeed, while trying to pinpoint what happened. Thus the researcher could ask if the students are being upgraded by the program or if this is simply another way of getting rid of some students or suppressing those groups in a community who are insisting on the creation of such programs. The program could deteriorate into a situation where the students are kept pretty much at the same low level that existed before the program was started. Or, it is possible that the program could result in helpful changes for the disadvantaged group. The re-

searcher's mandate would be to monitor the consequences of such programs in terms of changes in the district, establishing criteria for deciding the success or failure of a program vis-a-vis its impact on different parts of the district.

Doing research on a program that is locally defined and implemented can have many unanticipated consequences. The research focus would shift to how original goals or objectives get translated in the process of implementation because of bureaucratic practices, interpersonal relationships, and power arrangements that can vary independently of the original charge given to the researchers. Hence we could address some basic research issues on the organization of educational settings where locally defined problems could provide a vehicle for accomplishing the researcher's objectives.

A different way of posing the basic research issue is to note that practitioner input is of obvious importance, but the definition of a research problem for academic researchers should not be derived only from local conceptions of what needs to be remedied in the district. The way a district organizes a response to a problem and then implements solutions could be the focus of one type of research program. Evaluating the implementation of new programs and tracing resistance to a program are important goals for NIE, but they should not be equated with a program of basic research that would examine cultural conceptions of educational processes and existing practices under controlled field conditions with the

help and advice of practitioners.

Pursuing basic research problems would mean that research on educational processes should not de 'ependent on local school problems, yet requires input from practitioners if successful field studies are to be accomplished and cumulative findings are to b assembled.

## IV. The Significance of Field Studies for Understanding Basic Processes in Education

The use of field studies for the study of basic educational processes was a central theme for the participants at the conference. For most participants field research meant pursuing intensive ethnographic research after delimiting a circumscribed aspect of education like a classroom or the activities of a teacher or principal. This type of research means describing the actual behavior of the teacher and the children in a classroom over an extensive period of time, or the daily routine of a few teachers inside and outside of a classroom, or the actual behavior of an administrator as he or she performed various duties. The techniques employed vary from detailed tape recordings and/or video tapes of daily activities in a classroom to systematic observation and intensive interviews with a teacher or administrator over some period of time. It is assumed that extensive field notes would be taken during the period of observation and participation, and that other information about the school or district studied would be included as a way of locating ethnographic and interview materials in a broader context.

There was basic agreement that we need numerous detailed studies of day-to-day activities in educational settings. Such studies would require different commitments of time and different conceptual and methodological tools than those used in large scale

surveys or in the use of secondary materials supplied by the organizations being studied. The following brief remarks are intended to summarize the importance of field studies.

1. Field studies enable us to accumulate information on educational organizations as seen from researchers' involvement in the everyday life of students, teachers, and administrators. Field studies emphasize the daily involvement and perspectives of those persons whose activities generate the macro or aggregated outcomes used by macro theorists. The aggregated data are used by school officials for evaluating their own success and failure in public terms.

2. The emphasis on field studies is always longitudinal and follows individuals or activities under different conditions, times and places. The researcher must be sensitive to the fact that those studied can change their day-to-day behavior over a period of months because of the possibly intrusive presence of outside observers or participants.

3. Field research combines a use of elicitation procedures and systematic observation to study a topic, event, organized setting or loosely coupled but persistent activities. The same persons are observed in different settings, interacting with various others, or the same setting is observed to follow the activities of different persons over time. Students, teachers, and administrators are observed and interviewed or tested under different

circumstances.

4. The behavior of students in the classroom is contrasted with reported behavior at home and on the playground or in extramural activities. How the teacher and administrator evaluate students and themselves are subjected to independent elicitations and direct observation.

5. The effect of class size on school performance, language use and school performance, ethnicity and classroom performance, and other common issues raised in educational research, are addressed by observations and elicitation procedures. These procedures are enhanced by seeking informant feedback on the researcher's evaluation of earlier stages of research in the same project. When information is supplied by the school district showing correlations between class size and grade point average or class size and test achievement, additional study is required. Direct observation of grading and testing activities is needed to pinpoint how the school district arrives at the measures used by the macro sociologist.

Field studies enable us to examine basic processes in education that are not motivated by transitory national or local problems and opinions. One aspect of these basic processes includes an understanding of how information processing contraints can influence the child's understanding of educational materials, particularly when these materials presuppose specific socialization experiences, language skills, and cultural conditions not available

to all children. When these factors are added to the organization of classroom lessons, individual differences in following instructions in a group context, and different cultural conditions, then we are precluded from assuming that achievement on test scores can be interpreted as directly connected to class size, desegregation, father's occupation and education, or ethnicity. Additional problems arise when we recognize that the organization of the classroom generates constraints on how well the teacher can assess a group of students engaged in similar and/or diverse activities. The teacher's attention and memory skills influence the teacher's interests and biases in deciding what is adequate student performance. The routine ways that teachers record information and pass this information on to other teachers and administrators orally or in the form of written documents produces additional constraints that require careful study. Finally, there are a variety of administrative practices and bureaucratic structures that are imposed on educational processes because they are embedded in local problems of financing, recruitment of staff, and developments and changes in educational philosophy.

But field procedures involve drawbacks that need to be monitored during actual research. The attempt to be unobtrusive may mean approved active participation as a teacher's aid, teacher, or administrator's assistant. The data-base assembled invariably begins with field notes that seek to capture as accurately as possible the many transactions observed, unstructured interviews

conducted, and informal discussions with those being studied. How excerpts of these field notes are presented to the reader and used to document or ground theory require the researcher to be cognizant of changing impressions he or she may develop over time because of increased familiarity with those studied and an inevitable tendency to take for granted many routine but revealing aspects of daily activities.

When more controlled interviewing and observational techniques are used based on tape recordings and video tapes of classroom lessons, testing procedures, and administrative meetings that decide placement of students into higher or parallel classes, the researcher should have already established a general picture based on prior ethnographic information of daily routines, population size, ethnic background, spatial arrangements, existing resources, and previous organizational conditions. The controlled techniques provide comparability across interviews and recordings and can help pinpoint how communicational constraints evident from language use interact with cultural differences based on different conceptions of classroom and administrative problems as seen by students, teachers, parents, and administrators. Controlled observational techniques also generate details on what information influences teaching and administrative expectations or preconceptions in the evaluation of classroom lessons and testing activities. The availability of verbatim transcripts of interviews and classroom

interaction and video tapes of testing and classroom activities provides the researcher with materials that can be subjected to a more systematic analysis of how persons attribute meaning to the behavior of others and themselves. These materials also encourage the development of new techniques for understanding the significance of auditory, visual, and kinesthetic information in the study of social interaction.

## V. The Application of Ethnographic and Controlled Observational Methods to Educational Settings

Recent work by Harry Wolcott distributed to participants at the conference provides considerable information on how traditional field research should and can be conducted. The multiple methods used by Wolcott included an enumeration strategy to document the frequency of school activities. For example, monitoring official notices sent to and from the school to pupils, parents, or faculty, collecting records of enrollments, routine reports, the principal's own log of events, samples of the principal's work day over a two week period, assessing the socio-economic aspects of the school attendance area, and similar activities.

Participant observation was used to witness conversations between the principal, teachers and staff. Field notes were kept constantly throughout the study that would focus on general descriptive material as well as the details of a single event, meetings of a committee, and the most mundane activities in the principal's working and personal life.

Interviewing informants was done with a tape recorder using structured but open-ended questions to cover relationships within the family, the faculty and staff. Pupils from the fifth and sixth grades were asked to write brief and anonymous descriptions of the principal by suggesting phrases that the students could use as a point of departure. A ten page questionnaire was given to all of

the faculty and staff at the end of the field work.

The brief summary of procedures discussed by Wolcott provides a glimpse of the kinds of methods that could be expected of field researchers in educational settings. Additional procedures need to be developed that would indicate how the researcher might introduce more control into his or/her data gathering and analysis.

When ethnographic procedures are linked to the analysis of video tapes of classroom interaction or audio tapes of teacher meetings to decide classroom placement of students, the researcher can focus on how different language categories are used to refer to the same object or event or experiences, or how differences in language categories can suggest differences in how teachers interpret student behavior. The study of different dialects used in various school settings can be indicative of different social relationships and status differences within some organizational or community context. Studying how persons switch from one language code to another can signify in-group membership or an out-group relationship. The interview material elicited from students, teachers, and administrators can be examined for more than organizationally relevant content, for these materials can also be used to detect linguistic styles indicative of socialization experiences, difficulties in representing apparent knowledge about a problem-solving situation, social distance, status differences, and the like.

The study of speech production and perception during classroom

lessons can alert a researcher to problems in the way students comprehend lessons, the way test instructions and items are understood, and the student's ability to produce sentences that will be used to make judgment's about his or her competence.

The careful study of social interaction in educational settings means that linguistic selection or choice of lexical items, syntactic structures, sound patterns, and non-verbal behavior are an integral part of everyday activities. The verbal and non-verbal expression of insults, humor or doubt and a variety of emotional concerns and beliefs, presume that underlying cognitive structures and rules of speech exist that are associated with social meanings that can be attributed to surface or observable linguistic and non-verbal features. Hence when interviewing persons in some educational setting the researcher assumes that teachers can recognize deviations in normal language use and conduct and thus report on students' classroom performances. Interviews with teachers and administrators can reveal aspects of social organization that standard questionnaire-type items miss. The study of linguistic and non-verbal codes can be used to discern social and cultural characteristics that standard interviewing techniques cannot capture easily.

A number of cognitive processes are presupposed in the research problems posed in earlier sections of this report. If we are studying classroom activities or if we raise questions on how a participant observer can record reasonably accurate statements

about the range of experiences that punctuate a day's field research, we face the problem that understanding speech inputs and visual activities depends on the complexity of the channels carrying the information conveyed. The student's, teacher's, or researcher's recognition of verbal and visual information is dependent on language acquisition experiences, the constraints of memory, and the emergent conditions of the setting. The verbal and visual experiences of the researcher are summarized by the production of field notes and the verbal materials are often detached from the setting and occasion of use. When interviews are conducted the informant must make use of the same summarization process. These natural constraints stemming from information processing tend to produce summaries that can reify original experiences. Here is where audio or video recordings of actual settings and interview material can be helpful in understanding how field notes and informants' reconstruction of experiences can result in weak generalizations. Taking field notes each time after observing a classroom over a period of months can be checked against the teacher's official and informal evaluations of students and his or her conceptions of how different problems were handled. Video tapes of several mornings and afternoons of classroom activities can provide the researcher with details that can only be noted after many viewings of the tapes and the use of a verbatim transcript.

The teacher can be shown the video tapes to elicit his or her reactions to sequences and details that were not salient at the time the recording was done. Specific behavior by particular teachers and children can be observed over and over again to ascertain difficulties in comprehending lessons, the teacher's use of language, or the child's difficulties in understanding and responding to questions or instructions. The video recordings and transcripts of classroom or educational testing activities can provide strong documentation for more general inferences based on field notes.

The contrast between field notes of an event and later tape or video recordings can reveal how the researcher selects information when assembling descriptive statements about events witnessed. Comparing field notes with an audio transcript and then viewing a video tape of the setting studied on different occasions can help document inferences that are not available in macro studies using survey and demographic data. We need to show how aggregate data on large cohorts of students can be translated into the kinds of activities that occur in classrooms on a day-to-day level. We cannot do this unless we have a good base line of information on a variety of classrooms and how student performance varies under different perceived conditions, how teachers routinely organize lessons, evaluate student performances, and cope with different types of students.

The student's educational career reflects an important bureaucratic organization that generates different summary statistics when aggregated over variations in individual characteristics and related to the size of the school district, age, sex, socioeconomic status, and ethnic differences. How students move from one educational or bureaucratic category to another, how teachers and administrators interpret these categories and create policy decisions that affect the student's future placement, instruction and opportunities, all occur in organizational contexts that have a life of their own. Hence the focus of field studies should be on the ways in which student careers are produced in day-to-day circumstances, monitored officially by the schools, redirected by teacher and administrative decisions, and how these processes always involve organizational activities that need to be studied as independent processes. The dependence, independence, and interdependence of these different aspects of educational processes would be the central concern of field studies.

VI. Research in a Context where Teachers and Administrators are Sensitive to Outside Interference and Demands made on their Time

An important difference between field research and macro studies is the fact that the field researcher requires considerable day-to-day cooperation from many persons in the school district and/or school studied. It is often difficult for the field researcher to inform administrators and teachers precisely how much time will be needed from the teacher, students, and/or administrators. Many administrators decide on the relevance of a project by asking how much pupil time will be required. When large-scale surveys and extensive testing of students are done the problem of student time is a serious issue and the administrator often wants similar estimates of time needed from the field researcher. Convincing an administrator or teacher that the researcher would like to be as unobtrusive as possible is not easy. When more controls are needed that are intrusive it is not easy to explain the importance of long-term observation and audio and video equipment in the classroom or in meetings where important decisions are being made about the evaluation and transfer of students. If the researcher is not entirely clear about the sorts of details needed to complete the research envisaged, it becomes difficult to request a "blank check" to pursue various objectives stated in general terms.

The researcher must be sensitive to the possibility of

stepping into political problems in the school or district that do not relate directly to his or her research but where the research will be linked to political problems because of how access to a school and/or district is sought. Discussions of appropriate feedback are essential. One way of raising the question of feedback is to seek the help of professional educators inside or outside of the district or school who would be recognized as competent practitioners completely familiar with the educational processes from within education. Choosing persons from within the district or school would vary with the kind of research problem pursued. The use of practitioners as consultants or research assistants or collaborators provides an important bridge between the field researcher's designated schedule and how demands on administrative and teaching time are to be resolved. Because field research can be quite demanding vis-a-vis the time requested of teachers, administrators and students, some preliminary field work would be important to establish precise objectives as well as goals that involve a more open search for descriptive information about day-to-day activities in the classroom, school, or district. Hence proposals should address the problem of organizational interference and the demands to be made on the time of different persons within the district.

One way to anticipate problems of research design and the implementation of field studies is to include in granting agency

policies the possibility of careful pilot projects of a specified length of time. The pilot project would explore the cooperation needed and expected from practitioners that would also permit the researcher to specify both descriptive and controlled conditions of the field work. Hence a legitimate pilot period would permit the researcher to make use of consultants who are experienced practitioners and thus enable the researcher to define the final proposal in terms that would be understandable and of interest to teachers, administrators, parents, and students.

During a pilot phase it is possible to work out arrangements for feedback to the interested parties in a district. A constant complaint of practitioners is that the researcher pursuing basic issues seldom communicates his or her findings with those studied and the published results are difficult to find and interpret. The discussions with practitioners of time needed for the research and the feedback contemplated can provide an opportunity for the field researcher to explain the significance of doing detailed studies that examine everyday conditions of educational processes.

## VII. Conclusion

This report has stressed the importance of using field methods to pinpoint organizational processes in education. The interaction processes that produce summary statements and numerical outcomes on individuals vis-a-vis their behavior and achievement can be used to evaluate how the placement of students into educational and bureaucratic categories, and the movement of individuals between categories, generates aggregate data used for macro level studies.

A number of quasi-political issues will probably emerge in making decisions about the funding of field studies because field studies do not always suggest immediate solutions to practical problems in education. Hence a long range plan would have to specify that an investment in basic field studies may not yield short run findings that can translate easily into changes and specific recommendations. A funding policy that would indicate areas of basic research would specify topics and concepts that need intensive and careful study. Specific research guidelines should sketch out a larger picture that addresses basic processes in education that can lead to eventual practical applications.

Funding policies would have to establish criteria for evaluating the adequacy of ethnographic procedures. The timing of a study should be monitored to insure that after an ethnographic base line is evident, more analytic techniques can be introduced

that would clarify the ethnographic procedures. Field research often starts with broadly stated goals that lead to descriptive statements about a group or organization. Preliminary field work may be necessary to pinpoint more analytic objectives. Hence a committee could decide that the researcher's ideas are very important despite not having a clear picture of the investigator's research methodology because of the researcher's unfamiliarity with a research setting. Sufficient publications now exist that specify basic conditions for adequate field projects. What is lacking in the literature is a principled basis for avoiding traditional field studies that cannot be compared.

For many years some sectors of social science research have attempted to project an image of "big science" and rigorous quantitative methods as the basis for the funding of projects. Studies that are designed to explore a complex problem using field research techniques have seldom fared well under the conditions of a "tight" study that can claim explicit questionnaires and organizationally produced statistics that pretend to summarize complex events in neat numerical form. The pressure to do large-scale studies that will have a statistical output overlooks the fact that field studies can generate careful research that stresses invariant aspects of social organization. It is not that field studies will solve everything that large-scale macro studies fail to achieve, but that the stress on large, statistical

studies has obscured our understanding of basic social processes that are an integral part of all educational activities.

In closing this section, and the report, I would like to paraphrase remarks made by several participants at the conference. Careful field research on the social organization of educational processes requires theory and methods that provide direct access to the daily activities of the classroom, the testing situation, teacher-parent interaction, teacher-administrator meetings, school board policy decision-making, and the kinds of everyday behavior that are part of all social organizations. Everyday organizational behavior is seldom addressed in macro studies. Macro studies ignore the way people appear to one another, ignore the way people use or avoid physical contact in their relationships, ignore the significance of different forms of oral and non-oral communication strategies, and generally ignore how organizational members assess their moment-to-moment, day-to-day, and long-range circumstances.

Unless we develop and implement carefully designed field studies we will remain victims of our own bureaucratic accounting schemas. This means allowing abstract macro studies that can be politically expedient in the short run, to obscure the importance of learning about social organization as it is conceived and practiced in actual everyday settings.